

# Historic Context for the Restoration of Seattle’s Nihonmachi

## Background

In 1999, the Preservation Planning and Design Program at the University of Washington prepared a Draft Theme Study on Japanese American Cultural Resources for the National Park Service. Included in this document was an overview of Nihonmachi (Japantowns) which argued that these communities contained significant cultural resources that merited enhanced preservation efforts. Below is a revised excerpt from that draft study which provides background on Nihonmachi in general and Seattle’s Nihonmachi in particular. This portion of the study was prepared by Gail Dubrow and Nazila Merati.

## Historic Context

Nihonmachi were the center of Japanese immigrant life in America and were the community context in which most Nisei or American born children of immigrants were raised before WWII. Several Nihonmachi have been accorded recognition through National Historic Landmark (NHL) or National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listing including Little Tokyo in Los Angeles and the Japanese and Chinese Commercial Districts of Isleton, California, yet many more remain to be documented.

American Nihonmachi should be the focus of a National Historic Landmark Theme Study (or Multiple Property Nomination). Such a study would focus on the myriad Nihonmachi that were located in the states of Hawaii, California, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Utah and Idaho. These include Nihonmachi in some larger cities such as Seattle and Portland, which are listed as National Register Districts but lacks a detailed listing of contributing resources associated with Japanese Americans. It also would incorporate smaller cities that once had vital Nihonmachi such as Gardena and Terminal Island, California, and the White River Valley and Bainbridge Island in Washington State. A wide range of historically significant building types and cultural landscapes within these Nihonmachi are likely to be identified in such a study. These include community institutions such as association buildings, theaters, community halls, language schools, churches, bathhouses, commercial institutions and markets. By identifying them, it may be possible to better assess their potential for designation as National Historic Landmarks and for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

## Overview

The Meiji Restoration (1868-1912) that opened Japan to the west in the second half of the nineteenth century also spurred a wave of immigration. Agricultural depression and poor economic conditions brought a class of rural Japanese to the U.S. in search of better economic conditions. The need for laborers to help build railroads and power the development of the mining and timbering industries drew Japanese immigrants to the western region of the United States. The number of Japanese immigrants increased after 1882, when Chinese immigrants who had helped to build railroads and work in the mines were driven out as a result of a virulent anti-Chinese movement. U.S. Immigration policies that restricted the entry of Chinese laborers inadvertently opened the doors to Japanese immigrants.

Larger Nihonmachi developed in cities that were key ports of immigration from Japan including Honolulu, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and Portland. Culturally-specific businesses emerged in response to the needs of newly arrived Japanese immigrants, who required work clothes, documents,

supplies, temporary housing and places of entertainment. Community institutions established by the Issei provided a network of social, economic and spiritual support for the new settlers. Directories put out by the Japanese language newspaper *Rafu Shimpo* in the late 1930s provide a glimpse of services and goods typical of Nihonmachi, including prefectural associations, *gakuen* or Japanese language schools, community theaters and social halls, and religious institutions were established in urban as well as many small town Nihonmachi. Commercial stores, bathhouses, and hotels were vital elements in the larger Nihonmachi.



Baseball team in front of NP Hotel.

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Waitresses at Maneki.

*Kenjinkai* were prefectural associations that helped the Issei with immigration issues, the search for employment, as well as social connections.<sup>1</sup> As Japanese permanently settled in the U.S, Japanese associations became important features of Nihonmachi. These associations provided links to the government, in the attempt to protect the interests of the Japanese community, fighting discriminatory laws and in some periods encouraging assimilation in an attempt to ward off racist hostility.

Meeting halls and theaters such as the Seattle's *Nippon Kan* hosted puppet shows, recitals, martial arts demonstrations and other forms of entertainment. The theater was also used to hold community meetings.<sup>2</sup> Recreation in the Nihonmachi came in the form of individual sports, such as Judo or Karate, as well as league sports. Baseball teams were particularly popular. Teams played in Japanese leagues as well as all-city leagues.<sup>3</sup> In the 1930s pool halls became important recreation venues for men in urban and small town settings.

<sup>1</sup> Gail M. Nomura, "Washington's Asian/Pacific American Communities," in Sid White and S.E. Solberg, eds., *Peoples of Washington* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989), p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Nomura, p. 137.

Religious institutions served as centers for social activity in Nihonmachi. Buddhist temples, Methodist Episcopal and Christian Churches were key institutions within larger Nihonmachi. Shinto shrines were established in Hawaii and Buddhist temples typically dominated in rural communities throughout the western region. Religious institutions provided place for elements of the Japanese immigrant community to gather and worship; and particularly in the case of Shinto and Buddhist sects, they played an important role in preserving traditional cultural practices, including ritual observances (such as Mochizuki and Bon Odori) and the Japanese language. In fact, many religious organizations — particularly Buddhist temples — sponsored Japanese language schools or *gakuen*, which were intended to familiarize the Nisei or American-born children of Japanese immigrants with their parents' mother tongue and native culture.



Seattle Buddhist Temple at 1020 Main Street. Courtesy of the Archives of the Seattle Buddhist Temple.

<sup>3</sup> Nomura, p. 137.



# Historic Context for the Restoration of Seattle's Nihonmachi

Import/export companies established in larger Nihonmachi provided a crucial link to Japanese immigrants' homeland. The goods they imported from Japan allowed the Nikkei to maintain many elements of a traditional diet. The *Furuya* Company, with branches in Seattle, Tacoma and Portland, also had branches in Kobe and Yokohama and exported Northwest products such as lumber.

Japanese labor supported the development of agriculture in Hawaii, Washington, Oregon and California. The earliest Japanese in Washington were recruited to clear land around Yakima<sup>4</sup> In the early 1890s, Japanese laborers came to California to replace aging Chinese workers. Agricultural workers labored in almond groves, pear orchards, vineyards, cotton and hayfields. Many of those who stayed leased land with the option to purchase and established intensive cultivation techniques. They also were critical members of the labor force in extractive industries such as timber, mining, and fishing, as well as related manufacturing in canneries. As these rural communities grew, community services developed. Typical elements of rural Nihonmachi included language schools and religious institutions. In some larger examples, there were community and prefectural association halls, but more importantly, there were packing plants and agricultural cooperatives with associated buildings that brought together the community. Additionally, Japanese immigrants opened small businesses that serviced both Asian communities and the general public. Some of these businesses included laundries, grocery stores, general merchandise stores, tailor shops, barber shops, hotels, and restaurants.



Parade float by the Seattle Japanese Fishing Tackle Dealer's Association.



Interior of variety store at 902 Yesler Way, Seattle. Courtesy of UW Special Collections, Neg. 11544.

The passage of Chinese Exclusion acts in 1882 suspended the immigration of Chinese laborers to the U.S and denied as them the right to Naturalization.<sup>5</sup> This exclusion allowed Japanese immigrants to come to West Coast to fill the needs of western mining, fishing and railroad industries for skilled and unskilled labor.

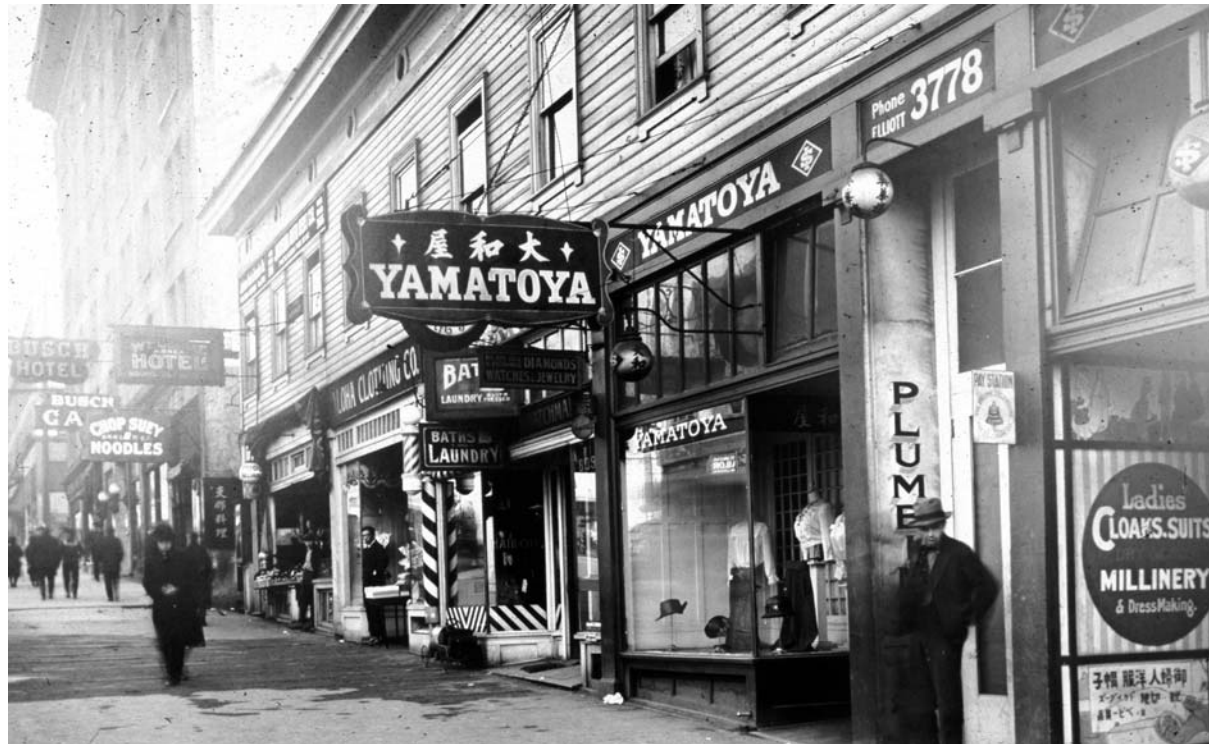
In 1907, the Japanese government prohibited the emigration of Japanese laborers to the US, but still allowed the immigration of wives, children and parents. The Japanese communities of Washington continued to prosper as husbands sent for their families and continued to bring over wives that they had only glimpsed photographs. In 1924, comprehensive immigration laws were enacted that prohibited the immigration of aliens illegible to citizenship. Though this stopped the immigration of Japanese to the US, the period from 1910 to 1920 witnessed a healthy increase in the second generation of Japanese Americans, who automatically possessed rights as citizens, having been born in the United States.<sup>6</sup> On the eve of World War II, American Nihonmachi had a bicultural character, reflecting an amalgam of traditional Japanese practices and typical American past-times. Perhaps this fusion is best reflected in the popularity of baseball. As the Nisei pursued this quintessentially American sport, they did so on ethnically and racially segregated teams, typically retreating to Japanese bathhouses and Chinese restaurants after the game.

<sup>4</sup> Nomura, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> Nomura, p. 127.

<sup>6</sup> Nomura, p. 130.

# Historic Context for the Restoration of Seattle's Nihonmachi



Seattle's Nihonmachi in its heyday.



Japanese American businesses on Jackson Street shuttered after the internment. EO9066, Wing Luke Asian Museum

The American government's response to the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor, which under the terms of Executive Order 9066 called for the forcible removal of all people of Japanese descent from the west coast, had a devastating effect on the residents of Nihonmachi in the Military Exclusion Zone, as well as Japanese immigrants living in rural communities in California, Oregon, and Washington. As Nihonmachi were emptied, their residents were relocated to inland internment camps for the duration of the war.

When the last internees were released in 1945, once-established and respected first generation Japanese Americans were left to restart their lives without savings, property or their businesses. After WWII, many Japanese Americans did not return to their pre-war places of residence. Rural communities with a strong Japanese presence, such as Washington's White River Valley, as well as many urban Nihonmachi, such as existed in Seattle and Tacoma, never again regained their pre-war population of Japanese Americans or their vitality. Many historic resources suffered serious deterioration and neglect as a result of the evacuation, much of the real property once in the hands of the Japanese American community was lost, and new groups came to occupy the urban residential and commercial districts as well as the farms that once were in Japanese hands.

Japanese American resettlement in the postwar period resulted in new population growth in suburban areas, such as Bellevue and Mercer Island, near Seattle; as well as in western and midwestern areas such as eastern Oregon (near Minidoka) and Chicago. In some cases the post-war

period also ushered in major urban development projects, such as Interstate Highway construction and urban renewal, that severely compromised the physical fabric of western Nihonmachi. If Nihonmachi no longer defined the boundaries of residential location for Japanese Americans in the post-war period, they have continued to serve important social and cultural functions, both as sites of housing for aging generations first of Issei then Nisei; and as the symbolic center of Japanese American culture within larger urban communities. Thus, the Sansei might live in integrated suburban neighborhoods but continue to return to the Nihonmachi to shop for ethnic foods, gifts, or to visit aging parents in affordable housing or nursing homes.

In some cities, the decline in Japanese American population in the post-war period was so severe, and the neglect of the physical fabric was so thorough, or the redevelopment pressures so intense, that little remains of the original Nihonmachi. Yet Nihonmachi are the most obvious places to begin a National Study of Japanese American Cultural Resources, since they are likely to contain the greatest cluster of commercial, residential and community properties significant in Japanese American history. To date, historic resources have been studied in only a handful of Nihonmachi. A key finding of this report is the need for a national study of Nihonmachi as a basis for improving the protection of places significant in the history of Japanese Americans. The section that follows contains information on communities that merit detailed investigation in the proposed NHL subtheme study on Nihonmachi. For the purposes of the charrette, only information on Seattle's Nihonmachi has been included.



# Historic Context for the Restoration of Seattle’s Nihonmachi

## Seattle Chinatown Historic District, King County (NRHP 86003153 and Seattle Special District)

Seattle’s Nihonmachi was the jumping off point for Japanese immigrants who were going to work off in the woods, bays and fields of the Pacific Northwest. The community was established as early as 1891 when part of Dearborn Street was known as Mikado Street. Seattle’s Nihonmachi was located within a 15 block area, bounded by Yesler Way to the north, S. Jackson St. to the south and 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. to the west and 7<sup>th</sup> Ave to the east. Seattle’s Nihonmachi contained all the elements necessary for a strong community, including temples, churches, language schools, theaters and community halls. A strong commercial district defined the core of the Nihonmachi. Restaurants, hotels, boarding houses, bathhouses and other community institutions met the needs of seasonal workers as well as bachelors. Seattle’s Nihonmachi served as a regional draw for Japanese immigrants who had settled on the urban periphery as well as in rural and remote areas. Those who lived outside of the city would frequently visit the Nihonmachi on the weekend to do shopping and attend events at the Nippon Kan theater.

Buildings contributing to the district that are significant in Japanese American heritage include:

- Panama Hotel (including Hashidate-Yu bathhouse)
- NP Hotel
- Rainier Heat and Power Building (Japanese Chamber of Commerce was located there in the 1930s)
- Tokiwa Hotel, Seattle, SRO with commercial
- Atlas Theater/Kukusai Theater
- Nippon Kan/Astor Hotel, Seattle, (NRHP and Washington State Register)

Other Seattle properties significant in Japanese American heritage include:

- Nihon Go Gakko, Seattle, (NRHP and Washington State Register)
- Seattle Buddhist Church, Seattle, (Seattle Landmark)
- Seattle Buddhist Church Park, Seattle, (King Co. Historic Inventory)
- Pike Place Market, Seattle, (NRHP and Washington State Register)
- U.S. Immigration Building, Seattle, (NRHP and Washington State Register)

## Sources of Additional Information on Seattle’s Nihonmachi

Dubrow, Gail with Donna Graves. *Sento at Sixth and Main: Preserving Landmarks of Japanese American Heritage* (Seattle: Seattle Arts Commission, 2002). Design by Karen Cheng. Distributed by the University of Washington Press.

Ito, Kazuo. *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America* (Seattle: Japanese Community Service, 1973).

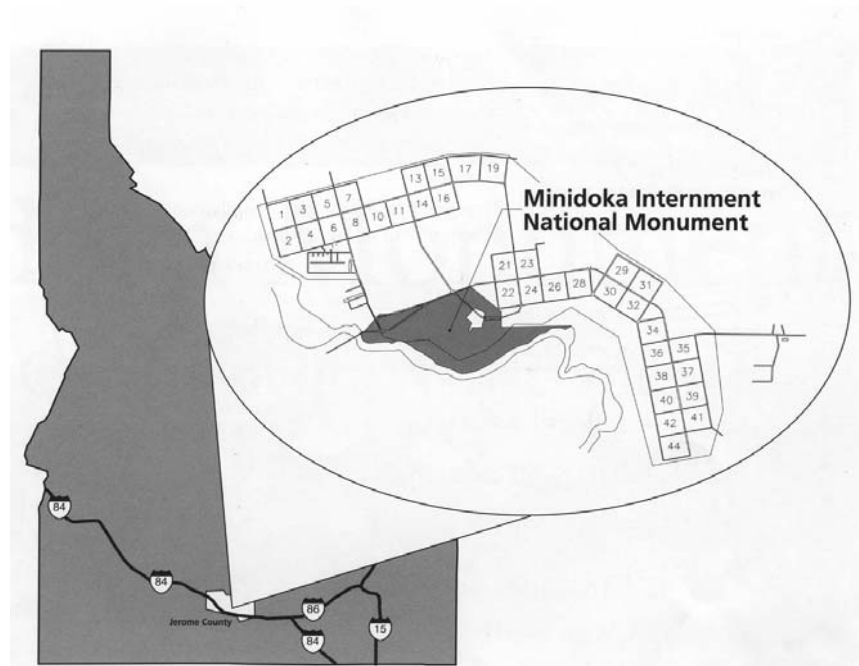
Miyamoto, S. Frank. *Social Solidarity Among the Japanese in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1939). Reprinted by the University of Washington Press, 1981).

Sone, Monica. *Nisei Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979). Originally published in 1953.

Takami, David. *Divided Destiny: A History of Japanese Americans in Seattle* (Seattle: UW Press/Wing Luke Asian Museum, 1998). An expanded version of Takami, *Executive Order 9066: Fifty Years Before and Fifty Years After* (Seattle: Wing Luke Asian Museum, 1992).

White, Sid and S.E. Solberg, eds. *Peoples of Washington* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989).

# Regional Resources for Preserving and Interpreting Japanese American Heritage



Courtesy of the Minidoka Monument *General Management Plan Newsletter 2* (October 2002).

Minidoka Internment National Monument is located in Jerome County, Idaho. During World War II, the internment camp—known as Minidoka Relocation Center or the Hunt Camp—housed a maximum population of 9,397 people of Japanese ancestry, including American citizens, from Oregon, Washington and Alaska.<sup>7</sup> There were once over 600 buildings at the relocation center, covering 950 acres. Today, however, only a few structures remain: the guard house and waiting room, remains of the ornamental garden at the entrance, a root cellar, staff apartments and a repair shop. Otherwise the site is marked by archaeological remains, concrete slabs, pathways and landscape features such as a canal and swimming pool.

Minidoka was designated as a National Monument on September 26, 2001, becoming the 385<sup>th</sup> addition to the National Park Service's roster of National Monuments. As steward of the national monument, the National Park Service is currently in the process of developing a General Management Plan for Minidoka. The remote location, 15 miles east of Jerome and 15 miles northeast of Twin Falls, complicates the process of increasing public awareness of the site and appreciation of the role that the internment played in American history. So too, the remoteness of the site belies its essential connection to urban Nihonmachi such as Seattle's Japantown, which was devastated by the removal of its population, as well as rural settlements of Japanese Americans such as the one that existed on Bainbridge Island in the pre-war period.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey F. Burton, Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), pp. 203–214.



The entrance station and waiting room, 2002

National Park Service



The entrance to Hunt Camp, 1943

Wing Luke Asian Museum

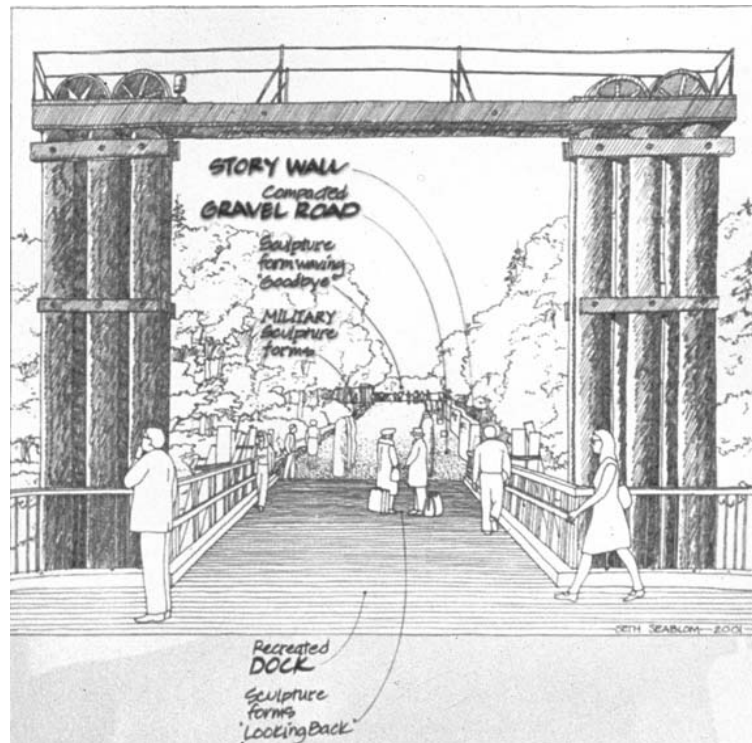
Courtesy of the Minidoka Monument *General Management Plan Newsletter 1* (2002).

In late June, 2003, a pilgrimage took former internees from Seattle to Minidoka, symbolically connecting the internment camp with Seattle's Nihonmachi. While the Idaho site will be the principal location for interpreting the internment, the historic center of Seattle's Nihonmachi at 6<sup>th</sup> and S. Main St. might also be a potential site for public interpretation, particularly in light of the powerful impact of the internment on Seattle's Japanese American community. In the process of developing strategies for restoring and enhancing the sense of place in Seattle's Nihonmachi, please consider the possibilities for increasing public awareness and appreciation of the internment of people of Japanese descent during World War II at or near the center of Japantown.



Courtesy of the Minidoka Monument *General Management Plan Newsletter 2* (2002).

# Regional Resources for Preserving and Interpreting Japanese American Heritage

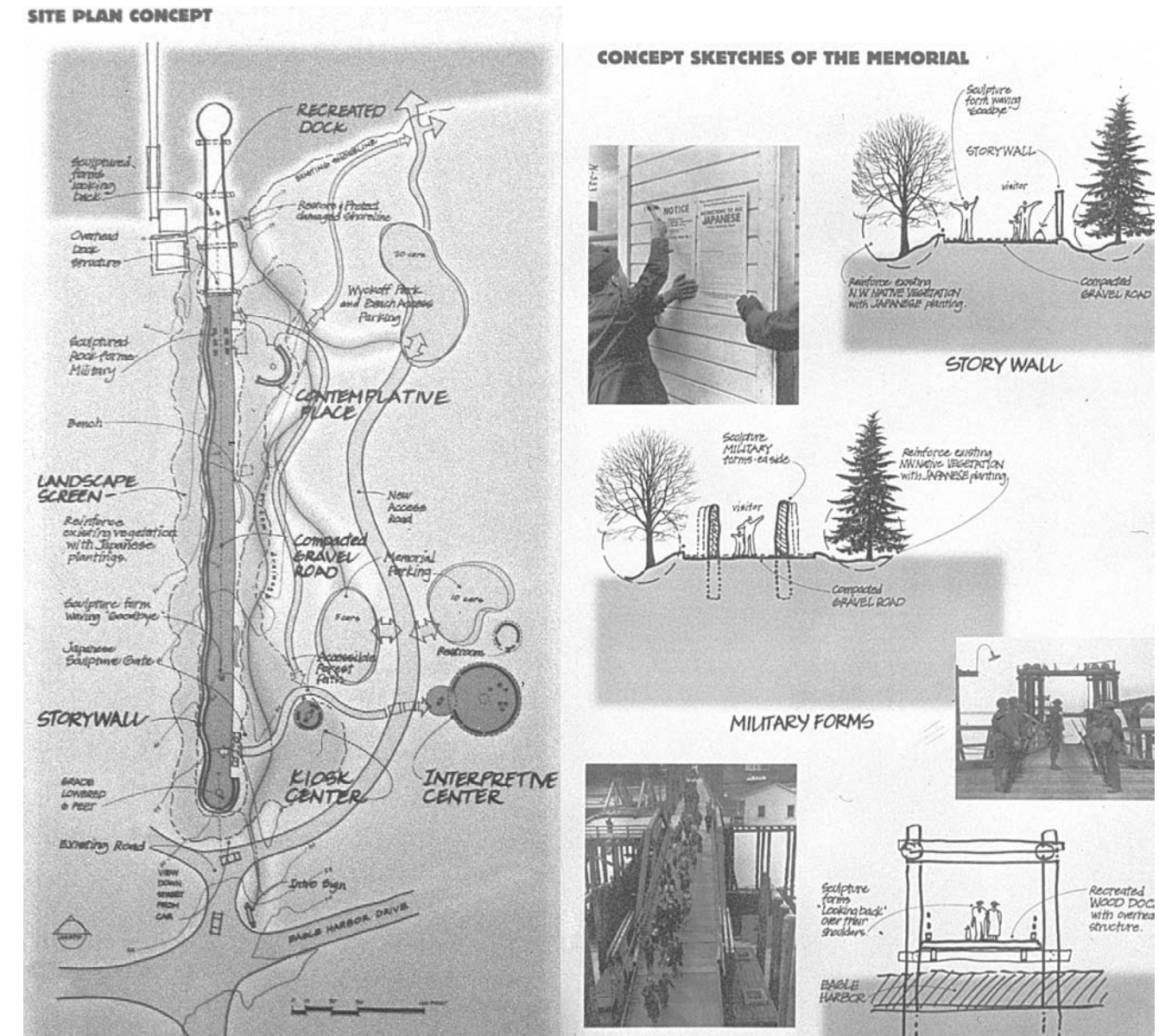


Plans to increase public awareness of the internment, currently underway on Bainbridge Island, also might be connected to efforts to restore the sense of place in Seattle's Nihonmachi. Just six miles west of Seattle, the Japanese American Community of Bainbridge Island has developed a plan to erect a memorial to the internment at the Eagledale ferry dock, on Taylor Ave. Bainbridge Islanders were the first community of Japanese Americans to be removed and incarcerated as a result of President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066.

On March 30, 1942, 227 residents of Bainbridge Island were removed from their homes, forced to board the ferry Kehloken, to Seattle, from there were taken by train to Manzanar Internment Camp in the California desert. Within a year, they petitioned to be relocated to Minidoka, in Idaho, where there were incarcerated with other residents of the Seattle area. The planned memorial at the Eagledale ferry dock is intended to highlight this tragic and often overlooked aspect of American history, and to serve as a reminder of the need for vigilance to protect civil liberties. They have entitled the memorial "Nidoto Nai Yoni" meaning "Let it not happen again."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For additional information on the history of the removal of Japanese Americans from Bainbridge Island see Ray Rast, Connie Walker, and Gail Dubrow, "NHL Nomination for the Bainbridge Island Embarkation Site at Eagledale Dock on Taylor Avenue." Newspaper coverage of the planned memorial include: Matthew Daly, "Japanese American Internment Memorial Proposed," *Seattle Times* (September 14, 2002); "Nidoto Nai Yoni, a Bainbridge Message," *Seattle Times* (September 16, 2002); Jack Broom, "Honoring Those Who Left, Those Who Stuck By Them," *Seattle Times* (March 31, 2002); Jack Swanson, "Some Want Taylor Avenue to Serve as Remembrance," *Bremerton Sun* (March 31, 2001). Current information about the Bainbridge Island Japanese-American Memorial Study Act of 2002 can be found on Representative Jay Inslee's home page.

A critical issue worth considering is how Seattle's Nihonmachi might be linked to the Minidoka Internment National Monument as well as the proposed Bainbridge Island memorial. Beyond the focus on internment, these places might be connected to sites of significance in Japanese American heritage within the broader region. These include the Mukai property on Vashon Island, with its landmark Japanese garden; rural agricultural properties in the White River Valley and historic places in Seattle's Japantown including the Japanese Language School, Buddhist Temple, Nippon Kan Theater and other significant cultural resources.



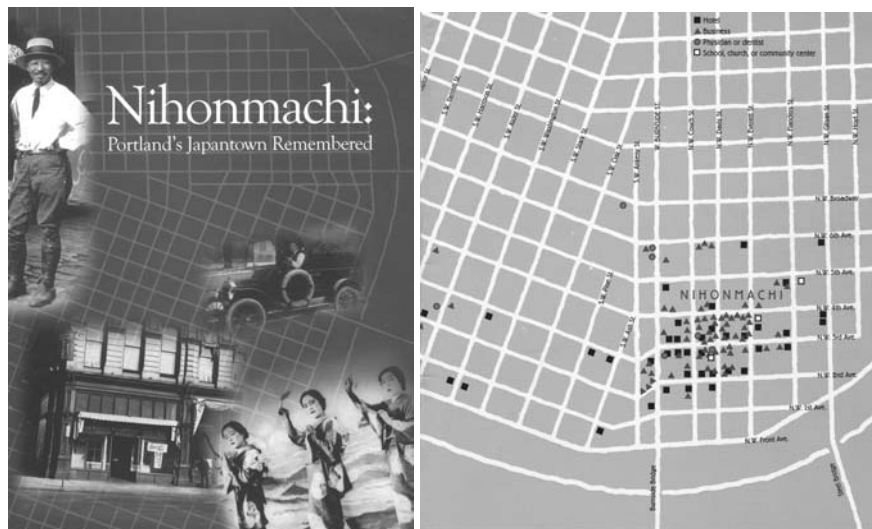
Proposed Memorial at Eagledale Dock on Bainbridge Island. Courtesy of the Japanese American Community of Bainbridge Island.



# Preservation Efforts in Other Cities

## Introduction

Before World War II there were dozens of Japanese American communities on the west coast of North America and in the Hawaiian Islands, centered in large cities, small towns and rural areas. Many of these communities located in the military exclusion zone either disappeared or were re-established with significantly diminished population after the WWII internment of people of Japanese ancestry, as many internees never returned home and resettled elsewhere. The Japanese American community of Portland, Oregon, has worked in recent years to establish a greater presence in the city's downtown. Likewise, Vancouver, British Columbia still retains some of the original institutions and businesses that were centered on Powell St. In California three remaining Japantowns are actively engaged in cultural preservation initiatives with newly secured funding from SB 307 and Proposition 40, including Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Francisco. The section that follows is intended as a brief summary of recent efforts to preserve the historic resources and ensure the cultural vitality of several of these communities. Additional materials on these preservation efforts will be available at the charrette.



From *Nihonmachi: Portland's Japantown Remembered*. Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center, 2002.

## Portland, Oregon

Located at the north end of the Tom McCall Waterfront Park, the Japanese American Historical Plaza, which was conceived and guided by the Oregon Nikkei Endowment, and designed by landscape architect Robert Murase, provides a public narrative of Japanese American history through a series of sculpted stones. Dedicated in 1990, it stands as a permanent memorial to the lives of Oregon Nikkei and their determined pursuit of liberty, equality and justice as American citizens. This commemoration was a combined effort of the Oregon Nikkei Endowment, Portland Parks and Recreation, the Metropolitan Arts Commission, the Portland Development Commission and the Portland-Sapporo Sister City Association.

Further information on the memorial can be found in *Touching the Stones: Tracing One Hundred Years of Japanese American History*, edited by Mark Sherman and George Katagiri (Portland: Oregon Nikkei Endowment, 1994).

Efforts to document the heritage of Oregon Nikkei led to the development of the Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center. Their home at 117 NW Second Ave., in Old Town, provides a base for exhibits, walking tours, and public programs that explore varied aspects of Japanese American heritage. Their latest publication, *Nihonmachi: Portland's Japantown Remembered*, is the first illustrated history of Portland's Japanese American community.

<http://www.oregonnikkei.org>

## Vancouver, British Columbia

Historically located along Powell St. between Gore and Dunlevy Streets, Vancouver, British Columbia's Japantown never regained the vitality it enjoyed before World War II. Today it continues to house small Japanese restaurants and shops, senior services and the historic Vancouver Buddhist Church. A history and walking tour of Vancouver's Japantown have been developed and a small booklet, *Memories of Our Past*, has been authored by Audrey Kobayashi. The annual Powell Street Festival, held each summer in Oppenheimer Park, is the community's major celebration of Japanese heritage. Tamio Wakayama has published a book *Kikyō: Coming Home to Powell Street* (Harbour Publishing, 1992) which includes oral histories of Vancouver's Japantown as well as a photo history of the Powell Street Festival.

<http://www.virtualvancouver.com/japantown.html>



Powell Street Festival. Tamio Wakayama, *Kikyō: Coming Home to Powell Street*.



# Preservation Efforts in Other Cities



Public artwork in Little Tokyo by Sheila de Bretteville. Photographs by Gail Dubrow.

## Los Angeles

Los Angeles's Little Tokyo has significantly benefited from California State Redevelopment Law. In February 1970, Little Tokyo became a redevelopment plan and project adopted by LA City Council. This 30-year project, which ended in 2000, has combined preservation efforts with a significant amount of new construction. The California Redevelopment Law, among other things, mandates the provision of housing for those with low and moderate incomes; as a result, the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) provided funds for the construction or rehabilitation of over 750 housing units—from single room occupancy (SRO) hotel rooms to four-bedroom townhouses.

Other CRA-sponsored projects have included:

- Commercial façade rehabilitation;
- Signage rehabilitation;
- Replacement of illegal signage;
- Extensive 'collection' of public art in and around Little Tokyo;
- Adaptive reuse of the Union Church as a Center for the Arts—a nonprofit arts complex with a theater, media center and exhibition gallery; and
- Support for first-time/start-up businesses with move-in grants and other incentives, as well as help with expediting building permits and zoning variances.

As the CRA states on its web page:

*Little Tokyo, located immediately southeast of the Los Angeles Civic Center, is the cultural, religious, social and commercial center for the Japanese American community in Southern California. Redevelopment activities in the last 28 years have brought about the revitalization of this century-old community with the development of the largest ethnic community center in the nation, a Japanese American National Museum which is currently expanding its facilities with an 85,000 square foot Phase II Pavilion, historic preservation such as the conversion of the Union Church into an arts*

*center, commercial developments including hotels, shopping centers and office buildings, housing developments, both rental and owner-occupied, and religious institutions. Newly installed public improvements such as malls, plazas and sidewalks link these various developments making this 7-block, 67-acre project area one of the most pedestrian friendly communities in Los Angeles.*

<http://lacity.org/CRA/glance.html>



Los Angeles' s Little Tokyo is a National Historic Landmark District. Photograph by Gail Dubrow.

Founded in 1979, Little Tokyo Service Center is a nonprofit charitable organization serving people in need, especially those facing language or cultural gaps, financial need or physical disabilities. Sponsor to over a dozen different community and social service programs, LTSC is also the sponsor of several major community development projects in the Los Angeles area, including the construction and management of Casa Heiwa, a 100-unit affordable housing project for individuals and families; the rehabilitation of Union Center for the Arts; and the development of Pacific Bridge, a housing complex for adults with developmental challenges. Its most recent preservation project is the rehabilitation and restoration of the Far East Building on E. First St. in Little Tokyo's National Historic Landmark District.

<http://www.ltsc.org/index.html>

The largest ethnic cultural center in the US, the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center was started in 1980 and is located in downtown Los Angeles in the historic center of the Japanese American community of Little Tokyo. The JACCC is dedicated to presenting, perpetuating, transmitting and promoting Japanese and Japanese American art and culture to diverse audiences and to providing a center to enhance community programs.

[http://www.jaccc.org/index\\_2.html](http://www.jaccc.org/index_2.html)



# Preservation Efforts in Other Cities



The Japanese American National Museum opened new facilities in 1999. Photograph by Gail Dubrow.

The Japanese American National Museum serves as a focal institution for preserving and presenting Japanese American heritage and a major tourist destination in the heart of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. It first opened its doors in 1992 in the abandoned Nishi Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, one of Little Tokyo's most significant historic landmarks, after major renovation. A newly constructed home for the museum, designed by Gyo Obata, opened in 1999 directly across from the temple. The temple building is currently the focus of a renovation and expansion project to create a National Center for the Preservation of Democracy.

<http://www.janm.org/>

Ichiro Murase's book *Little Tokyo: One Hundred Years in Pictures* (Los Angeles: Visual Communications, 1983) provides visual documentation of the historical development of Los Angeles's Japanese American community.

## San Jose

The Japantown Business Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting San Jose's Japantown as a unique ethnic neighborhood offering a rare blend of business, cultural and historical resources. With over 130 members comprised of local businesses, associations and community organizations, the JBA has played an important role in San Jose Japantown's continuing vitality. The JBA sponsors activities and events such as a

- Website: <http://japantownsanjose.org>
- Year Round Sunday Farmer's Market
- Health Fair and Nihonmachi Run
- Walking Tour Map and Japantown History



JARC's first home in the Issei Memorial Building. Photograph by Donna Graves.



Japantown streetscape in San Jose. Photograph by Gail Dubrow.



The Japanese American Museum and Library (formerly JARC). Photograph by Gail Dubrow.

Another key force in the preservation of San Jose's Nikkei heritage is the Japanese American Museum of San Jose (formerly JARC). It strives to collect, preserve, and disseminate the arts, history and culture of Japanese Americans in the Santa Clara Valley through workshops, special events, exhibits and oral history projects. The organization was originally located in the historic Issei Memorial Building, formerly Kuwabara Hospital, and recently relocated to the former residence of Tokio Ishikawa, MD.

<http://www.jamsj.org>

The Preservation Action Council of San Jose has been a longtime advocate for preserving the city's Japanese American cultural resources. The Council produced a walking tour and history that are still being used to educate the public about the city's Japanese American heritage. In response to new opportunities for funding cultural preservation initiatives in the three remaining California Japantowns, provided under SB 307 and Proposition 40, a new nonprofit organization has formed in San Jose, the Japantown Community Congress. The Congress intends to work with the City of San Jose on its planned survey of Japanese American cultural resources and to implement a series of new initiatives focused on cultural preservation.



# Preservation Efforts in Other Cities

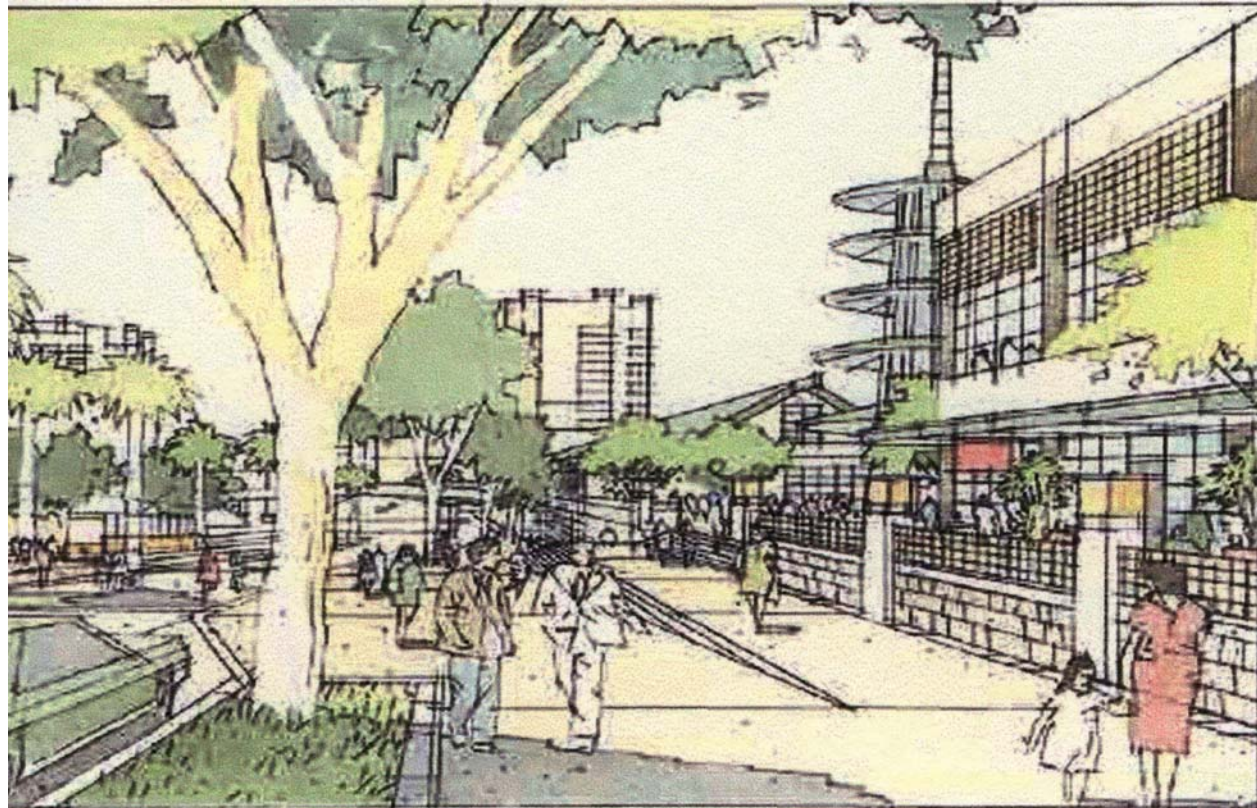


Image from *Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan* Japantown Planning Preservation and Development Task Force.

## San Francisco

The location of Angel Island Immigration Station in the San Francisco Bay testifies to the city's critical role as a port of entry for Japanese American and other Asian immigrants to the US mainland. San Francisco's Japantown has changed greatly over the years, but it still serves as a cultural hearth, as home to an array of businesses, community organizations and cultural activities, including the annual Cherry Blossom Festival, the Nihonmachi Street Fair, Bon Odori and New Year's Activities. The Cherry Blossom Festival has been an annual event since 1967. This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nihonmachi Street Fair.

San Francisco has seen significant community organizing in the past five years to preserve and enhance Nihonmachi. The Japantown Planning Preservation and Development Task Force was formed in 1998 to address the need for long term planning. The Task Force, with support from the Mayor's Office and funding from the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, underwent an 18-month planning process that resulted in a New Japantown Community Plan, intended to preserve and enhance the Japantown community. The consultation and community involvement process resulted in two documents:

- *A Community Needs Assessment and Recommendations* (October 1999/January 2000)
- *Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan* (November 2000)

The *Concepts* document addresses urban design and economic development issues, focusing on three dimensions:

- It identifies priority action programs and projects vital to the future social, economic and physical vitality of Japantown;
- It begins to define a framework of urban design elements that can guide the long range improvement of the Japantown neighborhood environment; and
- It shapes an action plan that addresses a broad range of neighborhood concerns and issues.

The recent publication of *Generations*, by the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (2000), provides visual documentation of the historical development of San Francisco's Japantown and vibrant images of its continuing role as a center of community activity.



*Taru Mikoshi (sake barrel shrine);  
the grand finale of the Cherry Blossom Festival Parade.*

Image from the *Japan Center San Francisco Map and Guide*.

# Preservation Efforts in Other Cities

2002 Year-End Report, California Japantowns Preservation Committee  
California Japanese American Community Leadership Council  
Submitted by: Alan Nishio, Committee Chair

## Background

With its establishment in 1998, the California Japanese American Community Leadership Council affirmed as one its three priorities the historic and cultural preservation of the three remaining historic Japantowns in Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Jose. Prior to World War II, there were over 40 active Japantowns in the United States. As a result of assimilation and the forced removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast and Hawaii during World War II, the Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Jose Japantowns represent the only remaining functioning Japantowns in the United States.

To strengthen the work of the leadership council in historic and cultural preservation efforts, the California Japantowns Preservation Committee (CJPC) was formed in August 2000. This committee is an arm of the leadership council and consists of representatives active in cultural and historic preservation activities in the Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Jose Japantowns. The purpose of the California Japantowns Preservation Committee is to provide a statewide coordinated effort between the Japantowns in advocating for increased support for historic and cultural preservation efforts.

## Senate Bill 307

A major initial achievement of the California Japantowns Preservation Committee was the introduction and successful passage of Senate Bill 307. SB 307 was introduced by State Senator John Vasconcellos at the request of the California Japanese American Community Leadership Council. This legislation established a pilot program to provide funding for the development of specific plans for the historic and cultural preservation of the Japantowns in Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Jose. This historic legislation was signed by Governor Gray Davis in October 2001. The major provisions of SB 307 included:

- Requires the State Librarian to provide one-time grants in equal amounts for Japantown preservation efforts in Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Jose.
- Requires each city to use the grant to aid in preparation, adoption or implementation of "specific plans" to preserve Japantowns.
- Requires each city to work in consultation with a community organization that includes but is not limited to the following representation: (a) Japantown residents, (b) Japantown business owners, (c) Japantown property owners and (d) nonprofit organizations serving Japantowns.
- Requires each city to evaluate proposed Japantown development to determine consistency with the specific plan based on the development's (a) impact on cultural and historical character of Japantown, (b) impact on current Japantown infrastructure and (c) ability to enhance vitality of Japantown and address community needs.
- Requires State Librarian to report to the Legislature by 12/30/04 regarding accomplishments of the grant program.

In preparing for the implementation of SB 307, the CJPC held meetings in March and April to begin planning. As an outgrowth of these efforts, the leadership council, in conjunction with the California State Library, sponsored a statewide meeting of community and city representatives from Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Jose to discuss how the provisions of the legislation could be implemented within Japantowns to further cultural and historic preservation efforts. This meeting was held in May 2002 in San Francisco with over 100 people participating in this workshop.

## Proposition 40

The CJPC endorsed and participated in the campaign to seek passage of Proposition 40, a statewide initiative that would provide bond support for capital improvements and facilities, including \$267 million directed toward cultural and historic preservation projects. Support efforts included participating in the statewide coalition supporting Proposition 40, sponsoring press conferences with public officials to express support and submitting articles and advertisements in community newspapers. Proposition 40 was successfully passed in March 2002.

In recognition of the efforts undertaken by the CJPC to promote historic and cultural preservation efforts in California's Japantowns, Governor Davis allocated \$1 million in Proposition 40 funding for California Japantowns Preservation. This recommendation was made in November 2002.

In response to Governor Davis's allocation of funds, the CJPC met to develop a common statewide framework for local Japantowns projects. Arising from these efforts was the development of the "California Japantowns Cultural and Historical Identity and Heritage Project." This project seeks to use Proposition 40 funds to preserve and revitalize California's Japantowns through cultural and historical identity development and beautification projects to increase visitation and tourism.

## 2003 Update by Paul Osaki, Executive Director, Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California

In November of 2000, an historic gathering took place in San Jose's Japantown; for the first time, representatives of the last three remaining historic Nihonmachi in California came together to discuss how they could collectively work to preserve their historical and cultural Japantowns. At one time in California's history, there were close to 50 Japantowns, but with the forced evacuation of those communities during WWII and later redevelopment, most were lost forever. Working and thinking together as a statewide coalition was no easy task. Most representatives from each of the Japantowns had never met each other, let alone worked together. Within the various Japantowns there existed many similar issues and several commonalities, however each had its own history and stories to tell. But collectively, they all knew one thing—unless they started working together, acting together and pulling their resources together, the fate and future of their cherished Japantowns were at risk. With the efforts of the three Japantowns under the leadership of the California Japanese American Community Leadership Council and many other Japanese Americans from throughout the state, along with the support of the California State Legislature, SB 307 was passed into law two years ago. This legislation was the first time in California's history that the state recognized the value of its Japantowns and the importance of preserving them. SB 307 also provided funding for the last three remaining historic Japantowns in California to conduct plans for implementation within their respective cities to ensure that these Nihonmachi be preserved. It would also create the first official definition of what "cultural preservation" meant from a planning and economic development standpoint and could be used by the State in its efforts to help preserve other underrepresented and exploited communities. Unfortunately, SB 307 was passed without adequate funding. Seed money was directed to initiate plans to develop the first phase of the planning effort which was to first have each Japantown develop a definition of what historical and cultural preservation meant to their community. The CJACLC will act as the coordinating organization of this effort. A final report and meeting will take place in early 2004 between representatives of the three Japantowns of San Francisco, San Jose, Los Angeles and others interested in the findings and conclusions. A year after the signing of SB 307, the California state voters passed Prop 40, a bill that would allow for funds to create an historical and cultural endowment program for the state to fund projects to support cultural preservation measures throughout the state. The Governor, in recognition of the efforts of the California Japantown communities, allocated \$1 million from Prop 40 funds to the three Japantowns to assist with their preservation plans and efforts.